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Biden approves military airdrops of aid into Gaza after chaotic encounter left more than 100 dead

Palestinians line up for free food in Rafah, Gaza Strip, Friday, Feb. 23, 2024.

Associated Press

By **ZEKE MILLER, AAMER MADHANI and MATTHEW WASHINGTON (AP)** — The U.S. will begin airdropping emergency humanitarian assistance into Gaza, President Joe Biden said Friday, a day after more than 100 Palestinians were killed during a chaotic encounter with Israeli troops. The president announced

the move after at least 115 Palestinians were killed and more than 750 others were injured, according to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry, on Thursday when witnesses said Israeli troops opened fire as huge crowds raced to pull goods off an aid convoy. Biden said the airdrops would begin soon and that

the United States was looking into additional ways to facilitate getting badly needed aid into the war-battered territory to ease the suffering of Palestinians. "In the coming days we're going to join with our friends in Jordan and others who are providing airdrops of additional food and supplies" and will "seek to

open up other avenues in, including possibly a marine corridor," Biden said. The president twice referred to airdrops to help Ukraine, but White House officials clarified that he was referring to Gaza. Israel said many of the dead were trampled in a stampede linked to the chaos and that its troops

fired at some in the crowd who they believed moved toward them in a threatening way. The Israeli government has said it is investigating the matter. The head of a Gaza City hospital that treated some of those wounded said Friday that more than 80% had been struck by gunfire. **Continued on next page**

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT 7 DAYS A WEEK

PROFESSIONAL COMPLIMENTARY PICTURES ON TUESDAY AND FRIDAY

SUNDAY:	MONDAY:	TUESDAY:	WEDNESDAY:	THURSDAY:	FRIDAY:	SATURDAY:
MARRYBELL MADURO SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm	ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	JEAN PAUL SAXOPHONIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	EDDIE KROON SINGER 4:00 - 6:00pm MAILLEYN ALVARADO VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm KARAOKE 9:00 - 11:00pm	MARRYBELL MADURO SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm	RICKY THOMAS GUITARIST 7:00 - 9:00pm	EDDIE KROON SINGER 4:00 - 6:00pm ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm

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Continued from Front

Biden made his announcement while hosting Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at the White House.

"Aid flowing to Gaza is nowhere nearly enough," Biden said. "Now, it's nowhere nearly enough. Innocent lives are on the line and children's lives are on the line. We won't stand by until we get more aid in there. We should be getting hundreds of trucks in, not just several."

The White House, State Department and Pentagon had been weighing the merits of U.S. military airdrops of assistance for several months, but had held off due to concerns that the method is inefficient, has no way of ensuring the aid gets to civilians in need and cannot make up for overland aid deliveries.

Administration officials said their preference was to further increase overland aid deliveries through the Rafah and Kerem Shalom border points and to try to get Israel to open the Erez Crossing into northern Gaza.

The incident on Thursday appeared to tip the balance and push Biden to approve airdrops. White



President Joe Biden meets Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in the Oval Office of the White House, Friday, March 1, 2024, in Washington.

Associated Press

House national security spokesman John Kirby said that airdrops are difficult operations, but the acute need for aid in Gaza informed the president's decision.

He stressed that ground routes will be continued to be used to get aid into Gaza, and that the airdrops are a supplemental effort. "It's not the kind of thing you want to do in a heartbeat, you want to think it through carefully," Kirby said. He added, "There's few military operations that are more complicated than humanitarian assistance airdrops" Pressure has been mount-

ing for Biden to move more aggressively to ease Palestinian suffering, including from lawmakers of Biden's Democratic Party. Even before Thursday's deaths, Sen. Jack Reed, chairman of the Senate's Armed Services Committee, wrote Biden this week to urge that the administration deploy a military hospital ship and support units to help treat Gaza's wounded and open a sea route to Gaza for delivery of humanitarian aid. "Yesterday's event, I think, underscores the need to find more creative ways of getting assistance in faster and at greater scale,"

Kirby said. Egypt, France, Jordan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have already used airdrops to get aid into Gaza since the conflict started in October. Biden in his visit with Meloni at the White House also sought to assure European leaders that the U.S. remains behind Ukraine even as he's been unable to win passage of a supplemental foreign aid package that includes \$60 billion for Ukraine in addition to \$35 billion for Israel and Taiwan. The legislation has passed the Senate, but Republican Speaker Mike Johnson has refused to put it up for a vote in the House.

Ahead of Meloni's visit, White House officials said they don't have good answers for allies about finding an end to the impasse with House Republicans and reopening the American spigot of aid to Kyiv that's badly needed as Ukraine tries to fend off Russia's invasion.

Biden, along with top Democrats and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, strongly urged Johnson during a White House meeting this week to take up the foreign aid package, but Johnson responded

ed by saying that Congress "must take care of America's needs first."

The leaders also discussed efforts by the U.S., Egypt and Qatar to broker an extended cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, Italy's priorities for a G7 presidency, migrant flows into Italy from North Africa, and their countries' China policies.

Biden said earlier this week that he was optimistic that a cease-fire deal could be reached by early next week. But he acknowledged that a prospective deal may have been set back after Israeli troops on Thursday fired on a large crowd of Palestinians racing to pull food off the aid convoy.

With Meloni by his side, Biden on Friday expressed cautious optimism that a deal can still be struck.

"We've been working and hopefully we'll know shortly," Biden said.

Meloni said solving the humanitarian crisis in Gaza was Italy's top priority.

"We need to coordinate our actions to avoid an escalation, and this regard we fully support the U.S. mediation efforts," she said. □

House Republicans send new Justice Department subpoenas in impeachment inquiry, drawing pushback

By **LINDSAY WHITEHURST**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department is pushing back against a new set of subpoenas quietly sent out by House Republicans related to the Hunter Biden criminal investigation in another brewing faceoff in the President Joe Biden impeachment inquiry.

The department said it has already taken "extraordinary steps" to rebut claims of political interference in the investigation into the president's son despite a lack of hard evidence for the allegations, according to a letter obtained Friday by The Associated Press.

The letter to Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan is a response to previously unreported subpoenas the committee sent last week as part of the impeachment inquiry into

President Biden. The subpoenas went to two rank-and-file attorneys in the Justice Department's tax division as well as two officials who have previously testified before the committee, U.S. Attorney for Washington, D.C., Matthew Graves

and former Delaware prosecutor Lesley Wolf.

The Judiciary Committee did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Hunter Biden's tax and business affairs have been under investigation in Dela-

ware since 2018. He is has pleaded not guilty to gun and tax charges filed after the implosion of a plea deal that would have spared him jail time.

Republicans who blasted that proposed agreement as a "sweetheart deal" have been probing allegations from Internal Revenue Service agents that the Justice Department investigation into the president's son was "slow-walked" and mishandled.

Six senior Justice Department officials have testified that there was no interference into the investigation from President Biden or the White House, addressing a central question in the impeachment probe, according to the letter from Assistant Attorney General Carlos Uriarte, the head of congressional affairs. It's rare for the Justice Depart-

ment to have rank-and-file attorneys give congressional testimony.

A deposition from the investigation's top prosecutor, Delaware U.S. Attorney David Weiss, marked the first time a special counsel has ever appeared before lawmakers while a probe was still ongoing.

Jordan has said that, for him, Weiss's testimony reinforced rather than dispelled allegations the special counsel didn't have the full authority.

The letter, which was first reported by NBC, asks the committee to send specific written questions.

News of the Justice Department subpoenas comes days after Hunter Biden testified behind closed doors as part of the 14-month probe that has largely centered on his overseas business dealings. □



Hunter Biden departs after a closed door private deposition with House committees leading the President Biden impeachment inquiry, on Capitol Hill, Wednesday, Feb. 28, 2024, in Washington.

Associated Press

Pentagon to lift ban on V-22 Osprey flights, 3 months after fatal crash in Japan

By **LOLITA C. BALDOR** and **TARA COPP**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon will lift the ban on flights by the grounded V-22 Osprey next week, U.S. officials told The Associated Press on Friday, following a high-level meeting where Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin endorsed the military services' plans for a safe and measured return to operations.

The officials said that Naval Air Systems Command, which grounded the controversial tilt-rotor aircraft about three months ago, will lift it and allow the services to begin implementing their plans to get the Osprey back into the air. Austin met with the top service leaders, including for the Navy and Air Force, on Friday morning, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss plans not yet made public.

The Osprey has been grounded for almost three months following a Nov. 29 Air Force Special Operations Command crash in Japan that killed eight ser-



A U.S. military CV-22 Osprey takes off from Iwakuni base, Yamaguchi prefecture, western Japan, on July 4, 2018.

Associated Press

vice members. The Japan incident and an earlier August Osprey crash in Australia that killed three Marines are both still under investigation. The Air Force has said that it has identified what failed in the Japan crash, even though it does not know yet why it failed. The decision to end the

flight ban is up to Naval Air Systems Command, but Austin had asked for an informational briefing on the matter because of the significant safety concerns and the fact that three of the services and a critical ally are involved in the program. While Austin does not have approval author-

ity in the return to flight process, U.S. officials said his endorsement of the services' plan was considered a key step.

In the months since, the services have worked on plans to mitigate the known material failure by conducting additional safety checks and establishing a new,

more conservative approach to how the Osprey is operated.

Officials said the U.S. military will also share its plans with Japan, which is the only international partner involved in the Osprey program. Japan also grounded its fleet of 14 V-22s after the November crash. Prior to the grounding the U.S. Marine Corps routinely used Ospreys in that county.

A return to flight is a sensitive topic in Japan, where public opinion on the Osprey is mixed. Officials said the U.S. is committed to a safe process, and the fleet will not fly again there until Japan has had an opportunity to be briefed on the services' plan.

The head of Naval Air Systems Command is expected to fly to Japan next week to brief the Ministry of Defense and Japanese government in person on the plans, and no Ospreys will fly until that briefing has occurred, according to another U.S. official who was not authorized to publicly discuss the issue and spoke on the condition of anonymity. □

FBI raids 2 homes owned by top aide to New York City Mayor Eric Adams

By **JAKE OFFENHARTZ** and **LARRY NEUMEISTER**

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Federal agents searched two properties owned by a top adviser to New York City Mayor Eric Adams on Thursday. An FBI spokesperson confirmed that agents carried out morning raids at two Bronx addresses, which records show are owned by Winnie Greco, a former fundraiser for Adams who now serves as his director of Asian affairs.

The purpose of the investigation was not revealed, and it wasn't immediately clear whether it was related to Adams. But it was another sign of deepening law enforcement scrutiny of the Democratic mayor and members of his inner

circle.

A person with knowledge of the matter said the investigation that led to Thursday's raid was being overseen by the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn, and it was separate from a criminal inquiry being conducted by federal prosecutors in Manhattan that led FBI agents to seize Adams' electronic devices as he left an event last fall.

The person wasn't authorized to disclose information publicly about the investigation and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity.

Neighbors of Greco's said federal agents began searching the two homes, which are on the same block, at around 6 a.m. and remained in the area

for several hours.

Greco was placed on leave Thursday, according to a City Hall spokesperson. A prolific fundraiser, she had worked closely with Adams for over a decade, serving as his conduit to the city's Asian-American communities.

In November, the city's Department of Investigation opened a probe into her conduct following a news report that raised questions about her political fundraising and whether she used her position in the administration to obtain personal benefits.

According to that report, published by the local news outlet The City, Greco demanded that a city employee complete free renovations on her home



One of two homes owned by Winnie Greco, an aide to New York City Mayor Eric Adams, is seen, Thursday, Feb. 29, 2024, in The Bronx borough of New York.

Associated Press

when he was supposed to be working.

Greco is at least the third aide to Adams whose home has targeted by federal agents. In November, the FBI raided the home of Brianna Suggs, a top fund-

raiser for Adams, and Rana Abbasova, who worked in the mayor's international affairs office. Four days later, agents quietly seized the mayor's cellphones and an iPad as he was leaving an event in Manhattan. □

New Jersey businessman pleads guilty and agrees to cooperate in Sen. Bob Menendez's corruption case

By LARRY NEUMEISTER
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A New Jersey businessman pleaded guilty Friday to trying to bribe U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez, admitting that he gave the senator's wife a car to influence him and agreeing to a deal with prosecutors that calls for him to testify in the corruption case against the powerful Democrat.

Jose Uribe, of Clifton, New Jersey, entered the plea in Manhattan federal court to seven charges, including conspiracy to commit bribery from 2018 to 2023, honest services wire fraud, obstruction of justice and tax evasion.

As he described his crimes in court, Uribe told Judge Sidney H. Stein that he conspired with several people, including Nadine Menendez, to provide her with a Mercedes-Benz in return for her husband "using his power and influence as a United States senator to get a favorable outcome and to stop all investigations related to one of my associates."

He said he also hoped the gift would, if necessary, stop a "possible investigation into another person who I considered to be a member of my family," according to a transcript of the proceeding, which the media was not told about



Jose Uribe leaves federal court, Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2023, in New York.

Associated Press

before it happened. Uribe said he made certain payments on the Mercedes "in a manner to conceal my involvement because I knew it was wrong. I knew that giving a car in return for influencing a United States senator to stop a criminal investigation was wrong, and I deeply regret my actions."

According to a plea agreement, Uribe could face up to 95 years in prison, though he could win leniency by cooperating and testifying against the other defendants, which he's agreed to do.

He also agreed to forfeit

\$246,000, representing proceeds traceable to his crimes.

Uribe was among three businessmen charged in the corruption case against Menendez and his wife, which was revealed last fall. Authorities say the couple accepted bribes of cash, gold bars and the luxury car in exchange for his help and influence over foreign affairs.

The defendants have pleaded not guilty.

Uribe remains free on a \$1 million bond, which was set when he was arrested. His plea deal, dated Thursday, was signed by him on

Friday.

Uribe's attorney, Daniel Fetterman, declined to comment. David Schertler, a lawyer for Nadine Menendez, declined to comment. Lawyers for the senator did not immediately comment. Menendez, his wife and the two other New Jersey businessmen are scheduled to go on trial in May.

Federal prosecutors allege that Menendez, the former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, used his position to take actions that benefited foreign governments in exchange for bribes paid by associates in New Jersey.

An indictment contends that Menendez and his wife took gold bars and cash from a real estate developer, and that the senator used his clout to get that businessman a multimillion-dollar deal with a Qatari investment fund.

Menendez is also accused of helping another New Jersey business associate get a lucrative deal with the government of Egypt. Prosecutors allege that in exchange for bribes, Menendez did things that benefited Egypt, including ghostwriting a letter to fellow senators encouraging them to lift a hold on \$300 million in aid.

Menendez also has been charged with using his international clout to help a friend get a multimillion-dollar deal with a Qatari investment fund, including by taking actions favorable to Qatar's government.

Uribe was accused of buying a luxury car for Nadine Menendez after her previous car was destroyed when she struck and killed a man crossing the street. She did not face criminal charges in connection with that crash.

The indictment has said the senator helped Uribe by trying to persuade prosecutors to go easy on one of his business associates who was the subject of a criminal investigation. □

Truck driver pulled to safety after crash leaves vehicle dangling over bridge across Ohio River



Louisville emergency crews rescue the driver of semitruck that is dangling off the Clark Memorial Bridge over the Ohio River on Friday, March 1, 2024 in Louisville, Ky.

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — The driver of a semi-truck was pulled to safety Friday by firefighters following a crash that left the vehicle dangling over a bridge across the Ohio River.

The three-vehicle crash on the George Rogers Clark Memorial Bridge connecting Louisville, Kentucky to southern Indiana was reported around noon, Louisville Fire Chief Brian O'Neill said during a press conference. One other person involved in the crash was immediately taken to the

hospital and crews set up to rescue the truck driver from the cab. It took about 40 minutes to set up a rope system and get someone ready to rappel down to the cab and hook the driver up to a safety harness and bring her out safely, O'Neill said. She was taken to the hospital as a precaution. "The train for this type of stuff all the time," he said about the rescue company. "This is very much a worst case scenario."

Firefighters were prepared and the operation went

smoothly because of their training, he said.

"These were some serious heroes here," he said. "This was some really professional, well practiced, well trained stuff. They got right out there, got right to her." Louisville Metro Police are investigating the crash and said the bridge remained closed Friday afternoon in both directions.

A safety inspection of the bridge will be conducted after all vehicles are removed, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet said. □

Cuban political dissident to receive 2024 International Women of Courage award by US government

By **ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ**
Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello, a veteran Cuban dissident who never left the island despite being imprisoned twice and accused of being a United States agent, will be awarded the 2024 International Women of Courage Award, the U.S. Department of State said Friday.

Roque, 78, who spent decades protesting against her country's single-party model, said she will not be able to receive the prize in person because she has been "regulated" since 2018, meaning that she is prevented from leaving the island and cannot get a passport.

"I am very happy about this award. I'm grateful to the United States embassy in Cuba that put forward the proposal," Roque told The Associated Press in a recent interview at the residence of a U.S. official on the island.



Cuban dissident Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello gives an interview in Havana, Cuba, Friday, Feb. 23, 2024.

"At least it is a way of saying 'you have spent 35 years working for Cuban democracy.'"

The IWOC Award, now in its 18th year, recognizes women from around the world who have "demonstrated exceptional courage,

strength and leadership in advocating for peace, justice, human rights, gender equity and equality," according to the U.S. State Department.

Roque, an economist by profession, worked for the Cuban government before

a political rupture that drew international attention in 1997 when, together with three other Cubans Félix Bonne, René Gómez Manzano and Vladimiro Roca she created the Internal Dissidence Working Group and signed a declaration

titled "The Homeland belongs to everyone," calling for political and economic openness.

The so-called "Group of Four" ended up in court and Roque was sentenced to three and a half years in prison on charges of attacking State security and sedition. She was released in May 2000 but continued her activism and in 2002 formed The Assembly to Promote Civil Society.

In March 2003, Roque was the only woman arrested among 75 people during a roundup of dissidents whom the government accused of accepting financing from the U.S. government and interest groups.

She received a sentence of 20 years in prison in a trial in which the strongest witness against her was her own assistant, Aleida Godínez, who then identified herself as a government security agent. In July 2004 Roque was released but not exonerated for medical reasons. □

Associated Press

British government watchdog says UK's Rwanda deportation plan could cost nearly 500 million pounds

By **BRIAN MELLEY**
Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The British government's contentious plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda could cost nearly half a billion pounds, or about \$630 million, plus

hundreds of thousands for each deported person, a report said Friday.

The National Audit Office report issued at the behest of parliamentary committees that complained of being in the dark about costs of the plan provided

the most comprehensive cost estimate so far.

The Conservative government had earlier only revealed a 290 million pound (\$366 million) commitment, so the new figures opened the plan to wider scrutiny from critics.

"These figures reveal the extortionate bill the taxpayer will have to pay the Rwandan government for an unworkable and inhumane scheme that will not deter people seeking protection on our shores," said Enver Solomon, chief executive of the Refugee Council.

No asylum-seeker has been sent to Rwanda under the plan, which has been blocked by the courts, though the U.K. government has already paid 220 million pounds (\$278 million) to the government in Kigali under the Economic

Transformation and Integration Fund to support the country's growth.

The plan is aimed at deterring unauthorized migrants from making dangerous English Channel crossings in unsafe boats. Under the plan, asylum-seekers would be sent to Rwanda, where their claims would be processed and where they would stay if approved. Human rights groups have attacked the plan as cruel and unworkable.

After the Supreme Court blocked the plan as unlawful, Britain and Rwanda signed a treaty pledging to strengthen protections for migrants and lawmakers in the House of Commons approved a bill that declared the east African nation a safe country. The bill still needs approval in the House of Lords, where it has

run into resistance.

The audit showed an extra 100 million pounds would be spent for the partnership through 2026 and 120 million pounds (\$151 million) would go into the fund after 300 migrants are relocated to Rwanda.

In addition, each migrant's plane ticket would cost 11,000 pounds (\$13,900). Another 20,000 pounds (\$25,200) would be paid to Rwanda for each relocated asylum seeker and nearly 151,000 pounds (\$190,000) would be spent over five years for processing costs and living expenses for each person who stays in Rwanda.

"This report reveals the national scandal the Tories have been trying to hide," said Yvette Cooper, a Labour member of Parliament. □



Britain's Minister of State for Countering Illegal Migration Michael Tomlinson, left, and Home Secretary James Cleverly, attend a press conference in Downing Street, London, held by Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, on Jan. 18, 2024.

Associated Press

Mexico's presidential candidates promise security or continuity as campaigns officially begin

By **MARK STEVENSON** and **FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ**

Associated Press

IRAPUATO, Mexico (AP) —

Mexico's presidential campaigns officially launched Friday with underdog opposition coalition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez leveraging the country's ongoing security problems to differentiate herself from Claudia Sheinbaum, the choice of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

Gálvez got the early jump on the campaign, holding an event in the violence-torn central state of Zacatecas just after midnight. The former senator and tech entrepreneur said that under her leadership "hugs for criminals are over; they will face the law." That was a play on López Obrador's shorthand for his security strategy "hugs, not bullets," which steered resources to social problems at the root of violence.

Four Mexican soldiers were killed by a land mine in the state of Michoacan, López Obrador confirmed Friday.



This combination of two file photos shows Xochitl Galvez, at left, arriving to register her name as a presidential candidate on July 4, 2023 in Mexico City, and at right, Claudia Sheinbaum at an event that presented her as her party's presidential nominee on Sept. 6, 2023 in Mexico City.

Associated Press

The president called it a "trap" likely set by a cartel. The soldiers inspecting a camp on the outskirts of Aguillilla Thursday when an anti-personnel mine was triggered.

On Monday, gunmen killed two mayoral hopefuls in the Michoacan town of Maravatio within hours of each other, the latest signal of organized crime's willingness to engage in local elec-

tions. Gálvez posed the choice as: "continuing on the same path which would mean giving in to crime or fighting to defend families, to defend the youth, to de-

fend those who work." Sheinbaum was scheduled to hold her campaign launch Friday afternoon in the main square of Mexico City, the capital she governed until stepping down to run for president. She has largely promised to continue the policies of her predecessor, something she repeated at an event Thursday, saying she would present 100 proposals Friday to drive the next stage of López Obrador's "transformation."

In places like Zacatecas and neighboring Guanajuato, Gálvez's heavy handed security approach could sway voters terrorized by warring drug cartels. Gálvez planned an event in Guanajuato's Irapuato later Friday.

"There will not be a more important priority than Mexicans' safety," Gálvez said.

She promised to double the size of the National Guard that López Obrador created to 300,000, but put it under civilian leadership. □

ICC rules that a probe into alleged crimes against humanity in Venezuela may proceed

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) —

Appeals judges at the International Criminal Court ruled Friday that an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed by Venezuelan security forces under President Nicolás Maduro's rule during a crackdown on anti-government protests in 2017 may proceed.

Appeals panel Presiding Judge Marc Perrin de Brichambaut said that the court "rejects the appeals" brought by Venezuela.

The ruling was immediately welcomed by the Human Rights Watch advocacy group.

"The ICC decision today is a beacon of hope for the victims of systematic human rights violations by the Maduro government," it said in a statement. "The decision confirms what

these victims already know, with no meaningful justice in Venezuela, the ICC provides an essential path to accountability".

The court's chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, announced in late 2021 that he was opening an investigation after a lengthy pre-

liminary probe and an official referral a request to investigate in 2018 by Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay and Peru. However, the full-scale investigation was put on hold when Venezuelan authorities said they wanted to take over the case. The ICC

is a court of last resort that only takes on cases when national authorities are unwilling or unable to investigate, a system known as complementarity.

Khan pressed ahead with efforts to continue his investigation the court's first in Latin America. He said last year that Venezuelan efforts toward delivering justice "remain either insufficient in scope or have not yet had any concrete impact on potentially relevant proceedings."

ICC judges agreed with Khan and last year authorized him to resume investigations in Venezuela. The judges noted at the time that "Venezuela appears to have taken limited investigative steps and that, in many cases, there appear to be periods of unexplained investigative inac-

tivity." Venezuela appealed the ruling, leading to Friday's decision.

Venezuela's government said in a statement it is neither "necessary nor appropriate" for the court's prosecutors to carry out separate or additional investigations and insisted that the alleged crimes against humanity "never occurred."

"This entire maneuver has been built on the manipulation of a small set of crimes that, as evidenced by all the information provided by Venezuela, have been or are being duly investigated and punished by the authorities of the Venezuelan justice system, in a sovereign manner as established by the constitution," according to the statement. □



A view of the exterior view of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, on March 31, 2021.

Associated Press

The district of Savaneta

A quick history guide to the island's first capital

(Oranjestad)—Before Oranjestad became the island nation's capital, Aruba's first capital was the district of Savaneta. Here is where the cultural identity of Aruba was born, and from where the rest of the island developed into what it is today.

Savaneta is said to have been the first place where the Caquetio inhabitants first stepped foot on the island. Though there isn't hard evidence to back this up, but considering the legend of the Cacique Arua, it is believed that there were already movements on Aruba—and Savaneta—around 88 AD.

The Caquetios probably made their way to the island either from Venezuela, Colombia or other Caribbean islands in the region, but with good weather it was relatively easy for them to travel back and forth in their canoes. So, since the Caquetios discovered the island, Aruba found her first form of civilization.

It wasn't until 1499 when Aruba met another group of people who set foot on the island: the Spanish explorer Alonso de Ojeda. De Ojeda first took notice of Aruba off the coast of Venezuela, during his exploration of the Latin American country. This was on August 9th, 1499. However, de Ojeda didn't actually sail to the island till 4 days later, on August 23rd, 1499. This was the beginning of the Spanish era on Aruba (1499-1636).

Alonso usually didn't stop at every island or land he saw, especially not in the Caribbean. He would often take notice of land from afar and continue sailing. However, Aruba was an exception. He had heard that there were "quebracho" trees on the island, which were commonly used to produce dye or paint. But since these trees could not be found in Savaneta, he continued to search in the

area of what is now known as Santa Cruz. The best way to transport the tree barks was via a route passing through Savaneta, and so the first road between Savaneta and Santa Cruz was made.

The Dutch colonial era (1636-1805)

During the 80-year war between The Netherlands and Spain, Dutch explorers and merchants began to travel to the ABC islands. Once they landed in Aruba, they deported the small Arawakan and Spanish community that was living on the island. This was the beginning of colonization of the ABC islands by the Dutch empire. Around the same, the West Indian Company (WIC) was born. Bonaire and Curacao were mostly used for plantations, where the Dutch had transported slaves from Africa. Aruba, on the other hand, was mostly used to raise cattle and to house the haring factory. The Dutch had often forced the indigenous community to work for them.

In 1636, when the Netherlands won the war against Spain, the country surrendered the islands to the Dutch.

The Dutch administration appointed the island's first commander, an Irish man named N. Williams. Because the Dutch were interested in other Caribbean islands and countries in South America, they imported Dutch merchants

and business men, all of whom resided in Savaneta. This way, Savaneta officially became the island's first capital.

However, at the end of the 18th century, the commander at the time, J.R. Lauffer, moved his office to what is now "Horse Bay" in Oranjestad. Because the highest office on the island moved away from Savaneta, the capital lost its title to what was called then Playa.

How Savaneta got its name

The name Savaneta probably has a Spanish origin. It was said that when the Spanish climbed a hill called Yara, they saw that the area was mostly open and had no big trees. In Spanish, such a land area is called a "sabana".

Because of its land surface, Savaneta was a great place to construct cattle farms. From here, the farmer culture on Aruba was born. Before the Aruban Gold Rush and the construction of the Refinery in San Nicolas, most residents

were farmers, and Savaneta had many inhabitants that farmed fruits and vegetables. They also continued the tradition of raising cattle, like goat, sheep, pigs and horses. Savaneta was one of the first places on the island to have a general farming culture. From this culture, many other traditions were born, like the Dera Gay Holiday that we celebrate every year on June 24th.

Source: Historia di Savaneta (History of Savaneta) by Adolf "Duffi" Kock.



Commandeursbaai (Commander's Bay) at Savaneta



Alonso de Ojeda



"Quebracho" (Kibrahacha) tree; used to make dye and paint

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Today is going to be a good day

(Oranjestad)—Here's why: Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Nature Calls

The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of 7907 acres protected

nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whiptail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center. For more information, visit the website www.arubanationalpark.org

Philip's Animal Garden

To stay with the animals, let's hop to an amazing place. Something different to do, an experience that is to be enjoyed by people of all ages. Welcome to Philip's Animal Garden. We are not talking about a zoo here, this is actually a sanctuary for all types of creatures, from horses to peacocks, kangaroos to turtles, monkeys, goats, and many, many more different species. The place was founded in 2009 and it is the only organization rescuing and rehabilitating exotic animals in Aruba, which has resulted in an amazing collection of these animals. They provide a suitable living environment for all the rescued animals. Up until now the owner, Philip, has built this shelter with his own efforts; building all the cages from scratch, designing all structures and welding them with his own bare hands. His goal is to upgrade the facilities to a world-class animal shelter with veterinary care and round-the-clock staffs. With the input from the Aruban community and visitors they provide the best care for these animals. Please check out their website for more information: www.philipsanimalgarden.com.

The Lighthouse

No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started the restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its

light. www.arubalighthouse.com will give you more information.

Kayak in the Mangroves

Mangel Halto at Savaneta is definitely a place not to miss out on. The beautiful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some work-out -as it might get a little windy and rough-, you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. Its fun, it's healthy and for sure something else. There are several companies that offer kayak tours, we had good experience with The Shack Kayak Tours Aruba, find them on Facebook.

Take an "off-road" sightseeing tour

A must-do activity on the island is for sure taking an off-road sightseeing tour. If you have a rented car, you can drive through the north-eastern side of Aruba and explore the natural pools, caves, rock formations and gorgeous view of the Atlantic Ocean. To access most of these sights, like the natural pool (Conchi) and the Guadirikiri and Fontein caves, you must enter through the Arikok National Park and buy a day pass. Then you drive up the rugged road that leads you through the white dunes, caves and along the wind turbines. Other locations, like the Ayo and Casibari Rock formation are situated more in the center of the island, and are free for guests, 24 hours a day.

Go for a shopping spree in the city center

Need a new bathing suit? Head to the city center of Oranjestad, where there is countless of different stores—both high end and more affordable—that can offer you the service you deserve! Local shopping stores often offer a more affordable price, and have a variety of clothes, shoes, bathing suites, purses and more. Along the Royal Plaza strip, there are numerous jewelry stores with great quality jewelry. In the Renaissance mall, you can shop high-end luxury brands, like Dolce & Gabbana, Kate Spade, Louis Vuitton and more.

Around the high-rise hotel area near Palm Beach, the Paseo Herencia Mall contain a variety of shopping stores, restaurants, small food stands and even a movie theater!



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Why You Should Not Miss Aruba's Free City Center Street Car Tour

ORANJESTAD - Aruba's City Center Street Car - or as we call it in Dutch; "Tram van Oranjestad" - is a single track tram line in Oranjestad, the capital city of Aruba. It was inaugurated on 22 December 2012, being the first and so far the only passenger rail service on Aruba and the rest of the Dutch Caribbean. There are two trolleys, a single-deck one with 42 seats and a double-decker with 64 seats. The line was inspired by the popular battery-powered streetcar operation at the Grove in Los Angeles, USA. Aruba's streetcars are powered by hydrogen fuel cells, which are charged by the island's year-round trade winds.

Caya Betico Croes, mostly referred to as our "main street" has been developed into a pollution-free

pedestrian mall. The double-decker offers you a 360 degree view of the downtown area with a picture perfect scenery of the island's clear blue skies. Who would not enjoy a ride on this beautiful and naturally air-conditioned vehicle? The tour consists of a total of 9 stops approximately 200 meters apart from each other; all stops are clearly marked. The tram will bring you close to different museums, historical plazas, monuments, the Protestant church, Aruba's high-end mall, retail shops, and a variety of local and international cuisine restaurants. The "I love Aruba" trademark also belongs to that list. The third stop on the route is close to a 5-minute walk to the famous Renaissance Marina showcasing luxurious yachts and Aruba's blue waters.



The "Tram van Oranjestad" starts from a balloon loop near the Port of Call and serves the downtown area

and ends at Plaza Nicky. The first ride starts at 10:00 am sharp with intervals of 25minutes. The last trolley

departs from the cruise port at 5:00pm. Don't miss this tour of the beautiful Aruba's City Center- it is free for all!

Blackstone Beach



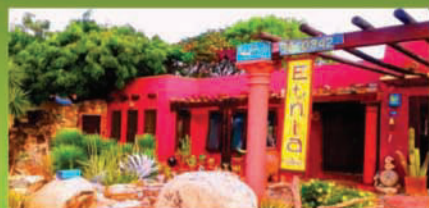
(Oranjestad)—Named after its most recognizable feature, the Blackstone Beach almost represents the opposite of the typical Aruban beaches. For one, it has black sand and is covered in black smooth stones. Secondly, it lies on the northern side of the island, away from the white sandy beaches of in the southern region. So, if you feel up for something different—or if it's opposite day, visit the Blackstone Beach.

Blackstone Beach shows the more natural side of Aruba: the stones that cov-

er the beaches and the shape of it has been crafted for thousand years via volcanic eruptions, coral reef movements and wave activity of the rural northern part of the island.

Located further east to the Natural Bridge and Andicuri Beach, the Blackstone Beach is relatively easy to access. Once you get passed the Ayo Rock Formation, take the Andicuri road leading up to Andicuri Beach. There, you can park your car and take a 1km hike towards Blackstone Beach.

This beach forms part of the Arikok National Park and is therefore a site that is preserved. This is why it is also relatively untouched by commercial influences. Despite being called a beach, do note that it is not advised to swim in the water, as the current is very strong and can easily stray you further in the wild ocean. However, you can still enjoy a spectacular view of the stones and the northern ocean that stretches out in front of the beach and take a picture with your friends or family!



Article by Etnia Nativa
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Native tree gourds or calbas

Episode CVI – 106

Since the beginning of time people have collected and selected all kinds of objects and things for an infinite use and reasons; plants were used to build shelters, bridges and transportation, for food, medicine, color pigments, to weave clothing and ropes, for musical instruments, tools and weapons, and all sorts of unimaginable things. The gourd was used a storage container, a gourd may hold harvested fruits, nuts, and crops or as a tool to serve and transport food and liquids.

Dried gourds where a stick is inserted through as a handle and filled with seeds as a shaker are called maracas, used to keep the rhythm during festivals and magic's ceremonies. There are approximately 850 species of plants which fruits, offer well-known natural light and beautiful biodegradable containers. Some offers a great variety of colors, others had flavor in a variety of shapes and sizes and shape; Some grew on trees others grew on vines from the spherical to the bottle-shaped, some were edibles.

Many originated in Mexico and Peru. Different gourds form different species were very much sought after and appreciated in Europe for practical and decorative purposes. Like many religious and metaphysical symbols, the gourd has a dual purpose: the gourd is represented as a maraca and the womb which carries seeds of fertility, here by representing a culturally symbolic musical instrument. When a gourd is used as a water container, it may also be considered a carrier of life. Without water there is no life. Unlike a harvested crop which must be uprooted from the earth and loses its life force, water is in a continuous state of living.

Long before the Europeans arrived the Guarani drank mate, a South-American tea, in containers made of



gourds where they mixed medicinal and aromatic herbs. This is how different gourds and calbas play important roles in different cultures. In the Taino creation myth it represents disbelief and the loss of faith and was used in the divination rites of the Taínos, in this tribe there is a story that tells that the Tainos in the desire to 'see' Yayael murdered warrior who they were invoking in a ritual believing that Yayael was physically inside the calbas, for this reason, happy in their eagerness to grab him, they spilled its contents.

When they realize that the contents of the gourd have turned into a fish, they

give in to physical temptation and ate the fish. In this first myth, the pumpkins are represented as a tomb for dead beings and a womb for living beings.

To get to know more over Aruba's and its origins, its animals and culture, we highly recommend you to book your visit for our renowned cultural encounter session has been entertaining curious participants for decades.

Mail us at etnianativa03@gmail.com or WhatsApp 297 592 2702 to confirm your participation. Our facilities and activities take place close to high rise hotels.

Aruba to me



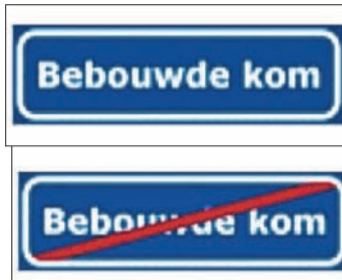
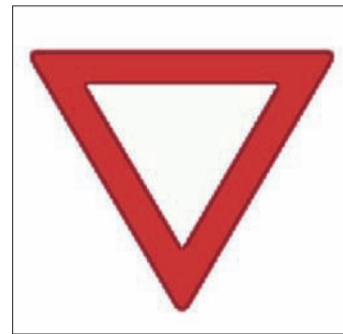
ORANJESTAD — You are back or still enjoying your vacation?... we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

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Did you know about...

Basic driving rules on Aruba (part 2)



(Oranjestad)—In Yesterday's issue, we've provided some basic rules when driving on the four-lane highways and roundabouts on the island. Today, we want to offer you more tips and tricks when it comes to driving on the roads and highways of Aruba.

Speed limit in certain areas
As mentioned in yesterday's issue, the legal minimum and maximum speed limit on the island is 50 and 80 km/h respectively. However, there are some areas where it is mandated to drive up to a certain speed. This is always indicated by a

circular traffic sign with red border and the number 50 on it. Signs like these are always paired by a similar sign with the number crossed out further down the road. This means that the mandate for this speed is now over; you may increase your velocity. Red borders on traffic sign—whether it's a circle or triangle—usually signal a warning, prohibition or preference.

Besides the "50" sign, you may also encounter a traffic sign that says "bebouwde kom". These can be found in San Nicolas and Oranjestad. Bebouwde

kom signs are rectangular and blue, and essentially tell you that you are in a heavily inhabited area. The maximum speed limit in a bebouwde kom is 50 km/h. Just like the previous pair, bebouwde kom signs are also paired with a similar sign crossed out.

Priority signs
On the main roads of Aruba (not the highways), you may see a yellow, squared sign with a white border. This sign tells you that on this road, you have priority and all other traffic should yield to you. This sign can be seen in Savaneta for example. So, if you are driving

on the main road in Savaneta going to San Nicolas, you are driving on a single long road, and other cars that want to get on this main road or cross it, either from an intersection or from a dirt road, must all wait until traffic on the main road is clear. In other words, you do not have to stop for them. This sign too has a counter part that indicates that your priority is over.

Another priority sign you may encounter is a triangle sign with a red border and something that looks like a cross. You'll see this sign in an intersection. The general rule of thumb for crossing an intersection that do not contain traffic lights, roundabouts, sign or arrows on the road, is to always yield for traffic on your right. However, if you encounter this sign on your side of the intersection, you have priority over the other cars,

even the one on your right.

However, be careful not to confuse this sign with a similar up-side down triangle, also found on intersections. This sign is a prohibition sign, telling you that you have to stop and give other cars priority. Of course you also have a "stop" sign that mean the same thing. The stop sign is generally used for tricky intersections with minimal view of opposite incoming traffic.

These are some of the basic rules that you would have to know if you decide to drive on the island. These are of course other traffic signs, and we recommend you visit aruba-travelguide.com for an extensive overview of all traffic signs used on Aruba.

Picture credits: aruba-travelguide.com

Ayo & Casibari: Aruba's famous rock formations

(Oranjestad)—The Ayo and Casibari Rock Formations are known locally as one of the crucial sites to have in your "off-road" trip itinerary. These naturally formed rock formations as just one of the few places on the island that hold a rich history of our culture and of our ancestors.

Ayo
The Ayo Rock Formation is located in the northern part of the island, right on the road that leads you to the Black Stone Beach, and close to the Natural Bridge. The Ayo is a fenced terrain that consists of several giant boulders, resting neatly on top of or side by side each other, adding gorgeous natural architecture to the surrounding "mondi"*. This

is also one of the few sites to contain prehistoric markings of our indigenous ancestors. The Ayo Rock formation contains stairs that lead you to the top of the highest boulder, offering a breath-taking view of the Aruban backyard. The Ayo is usually quiet, as it is situated farther away from the busier parts of the island. However, this is just another charm of the site: the quiet area and the refreshing breeze offer a sense of comfort and peace.

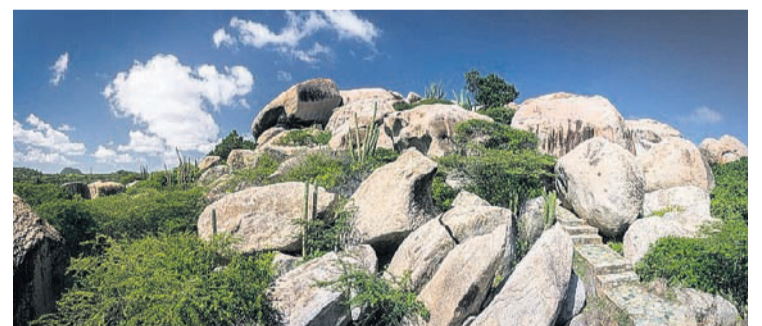
Casibari
Probably the busier rock formation site, the Casibari is situated more in the center of the island, much closer—and more accessible—to the general public. Just like Ayo, Casibari

is a fenced area containing several boulders that lay on top or lean on each other. The best aspect of the Casibari Rock Formation is the accompanying view when you climb up the top of the round, flat bolder. For this position, you can see the majority of the island and the ocean in the south. Right in front of the entrance, there is the Casibari Café and Grill, a great place to get refreshments and snack before continuing your off-road adventure!

Both sites are open free to the public, 24 hours a day. However, unless you are taking a trip with a professional tour guide, there are no guides at the sites to help you climb the rock.

So, do be careful when trudging on the boulders, and make sure to befriend any roaming goats you see along the way!

*Mondi: what we call our Aruban wilderness. We don't have forests, or deserts, but we do have mondi!



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 39 King or czar
 - 1 Cast member
 - 6 Swirly prints
 - 11 Bear out
 - 12 Chip choice
 - 13 Heathen
 - 14 One with a record
 - 15 View-points
 - 17 Pindar work
 - 18 Tell tales
 - 19 Was indecisive
 - 22 Young fellow
 - 23 Changes, in a way
 - 24 Govt. investment
 - 25 Clock topper
 - 27 Really impress
 - 30 Words before asking a favor
 - 31 Director Spike
 - 32 Corn unit
 - 33 Mischievous one
 - 35 Stroll
 - 38 Chap
- DOWN**
- 1 Horrify
 - 2 Brain cases
 - 3 — up (got dressed)
 - 4 Track shape
 - 5 Like wind and solar energy
 - 6 Binary digit
 - 7 Peace, to Caesar
 - 8 Harmony
 - 9 Aegean island
 - 10 In shape
 - 16 Tea urn
 - 20 Esteemed
 - 21 Break off
 - 24 TVs Danson
 - 25 Join forces
 - 26 Sing like a bird
 - 27 Statue setting
 - 28 Flag
 - 29 Some fishers
 - 30 Carries base, in a way
 - 36 Pasture
 - 37 Make goofs

P	A	C	E	D	P	A	C	T	S
A	L	A	M	O	A	P	A	R	T
D	I	S	C	S	R	O	S	I	E
T	E	E	M	S	T	O	P		
B	A	S	E	O	P	T	S		
A	L	A	G	O	U	L	A	S	H
R	O	V	E	R	T	E	S	L	A
S	T	O	R	I	E	S	P	U	N
T	A	P	S	L	E	G	S		
A	R	E	S	S	E	A	L		
R	U	F	U	S	T	U	L	S	A
A	D	O	R	E	C	R	O	O	N
B	E	R	E	T	H	A	N	D	Y

Yesterday's answer

- DOWN**
- 1 Horrify
 - 2 Brain cases
 - 3 — up (got dressed)
 - 4 Track shape
 - 5 Like wind and solar energy
 - 6 Binary digit
 - 7 Peace, to Caesar
 - 8 Harmony
 - 9 Aegean island
 - 10 In shape
 - 16 Tea urn
 - 20 Esteemed
 - 21 Break off
 - 24 TVs Danson
 - 25 Join forces
 - 26 Sing like a bird
 - 27 Statue setting
 - 28 Flag
 - 29 Some fishers
 - 30 Carries base, in a way
 - 36 Pasture
 - 37 Make goofs

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11						12			
13						14			
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			24						
	25	26					27	28	29
30								31	
32					33		34		
35			36	37			38		
39							40		
41							42		

3-2

A XYDLB A A X R
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-2 **CRYPTOQUOTE**
Q K K E Q X C K Y P N M R C D H V X

M N Q Z X Y F N X X D N R Z O Q F C.

— FRK KRQL CDQINCONQZN
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: MARCH, WHEN DAYS ARE GETTING LONG, LET THY GROWING HOURS BE STRONG TO SET RIGHT SOME WINTRY WRONG. — CAROLINE MAY

Humanoid robot-maker Figure partners with OpenAI and gets backing from Jeff Bezos and tech giants

By MATT O'BRIEN
AP Technology Writer

ChatGPT-maker OpenAI is looking to fuse its artificial intelligence systems into the bodies of humanoid robots as part of a new deal with robotics startup Figure. Sunnyvale, California-based Figure announced the partnership Thursday along with \$675 million in venture capital funding from a group that includes Amazon founder Jeff Bezos as well as Microsoft, chip-maker Nvidia and the start-up-funding divisions of Intel and OpenAI.

Figure is less than two years old and doesn't have a commercial product but is persuading influential tech industry backers to support its vision of shipping billions of human-like robots to the world's workplaces and homes. "If we can just get humanoids to do work that humans are not wanting to do because there's a shortfall of humans, we can sell millions of humanoids, bil-



AI engineer Jenna Reher works on humanoid robot Figure 01 at Figure AI's test facility in Sunnyvale, Calif., Oct. 3, 2023.

Associated Press

lions maybe," Figure CEO Brett Adcock told The Associated Press last year. For OpenAI, which dabbled in robotics research before pivoting to a focus on the AI large language models that power ChatGPT, the partnership will "open up new possibilities for how robots can help in everyday life," said Peter Welinder, the San Francisco company's vice president of product and partnerships, in a

written statement. Financial terms of the deal between Figure and OpenAI weren't disclosed. The collaboration will have OpenAI building specialized AI models for Figure's humanoid robots, likely based on OpenAI's existing technology such as GPT language models, the image-generator DALL-E and the new video-generator Sora. □

Some doorbell cameras sold on Amazon and other online sites have major security flaws, report says



An EKEN doorbell camera, along with other models, are shown on display at CES International, Jan. 10, 2019, in Las Vegas.

Associated Press

By HALELUYA HADERO
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Some doorbell cameras sold by Amazon and other online retailers have security flaws that could allow bad actors to view footage from the devices or control them completely, according to an investigation published Thursday by Consumer Reports.

Researchers from the product-review organization said they found major vulnerabilities in cameras manufactured by the Chinese company Eken Group Ltd., which produces video doorbells under the brand names EKEN and Tuck, among others. □

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U.S. health officials drop 5-day isolation time for COVID-19

By **MIKE STOBBE**
AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Americans who test positive for COVID-19 no longer need to stay in isolation for five days, U.S. health officials announced Friday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention changed its longstanding guidance, saying that people can return to work or regular activities if their symptoms are mild and improving and it's been a day since they've had a fever.

The change comes at a time when COVID-19 is no longer the public health menace it once was. It dropped from being the nation's third leading cause of death early in the pandemic to 10th last year.

Most people have some degree of immunity to the coronavirus from past vaccinations or from infections. And many people are not following the five-day isolation guidance anyway, some experts say.

"Our goal here is to continue to protect those at risk for severe illness while also reassuring folks that these recommendation are simple, clear, easy to understand, and can be followed," said Dr. Mandy Cohen, the CDC's director. However, some experts



McKenna Shuster works on a linocut art print which she does as a hobby in her home on the last night of a two-week self-isolation while recovering from symptoms of COVID-19 in Somerville, Mass., on March 26, 2020.

Associated Press

worry that the change may increase the risk of infection for older people and others who are more vulnerable to getting seriously ill.

WHY ARE THE GUIDELINES CHANGING?

COVID-19 is not causing as many hospitalizations and deaths as it did in the first years of the pandemic. The change is an effort to streamline recommendations so they are similar to longstanding recommendations for flu and other respiratory viruses. Many people with a runny nose, cough or other symptoms aren't testing to distinguish whether it's COVID-19, flu, or something else, officials say.

It may not be as stringent, but the guidance emphasizes that all people with respiratory symptoms should stay home while they are sick, said Dr. David Margolius, the head of Cleveland's health department.



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People are likely still contagious when they test positive, and that hasn't changed, said Jennifer Nuzzo, director of the Pandemic Center at Brown University's School of Public Health. "What has changed is how much COVID is harming us as a population," Nuzzo said.



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African American Film Critics group celebrates Black Hollywood and beyond while building its stature

By **JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr.**
AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Filmmaker Ava DuVernay remembered working as a publicist years ago, struggling to draw major traffic to star-studded events for the African American Film Critics Association.

No matter which renowned Black actor showed up from Viola Davis to Forest Whitaker the organization known as AAFCA still had a hard time garnering mainstream media's attention and attendance from non-Black honorees to its flagship awards ceremony and other events. But the group, led by co-founder and president Gil Robertson IV, stayed its course to review and pay homage to Black actors and filmmakers detailing the African American experience.

Now, two decades after its founding as a small organization, AAFCA has grown in size and scope and built an admirable reputation in Hollywood. Its Special Achievement Awards will be held this weekend.

"It was an idea. It was a dream. It was this little dinky thing, but it was always beautiful," said DuVernay, whose public relations company represented AAFCA the first few years before she became a filmmaker. "It was rough around the edges. It was respect. The community came, the press wouldn't cover it. Actors, creatives, writers, and directors immediately jumped to it. We worked hard to establish what it was... So, I have a great affection for this group."

These days, AAFCA has become a consistent support base for Black Hollywood and beyond. The organization's annual awards has evolved into a glitzy affair with high-profile attendees such as Oprah Winfrey, Jamie Foxx and Will Smith. Non-Black honorees have also become regulars, such as Native American and Oscar nominee Lily Gladstone, who was recognized



Sterling K. Brown, from left, Ryan Michelle Bathe and Gil Robertson attend the 15th Annual AAFCA Awards on Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2024, in Beverly Hills, Calif.

Associated Press

for her breakout role in "Killers of the Flower Moon" during AAFCA's 15th annual awards ceremony last month in Beverly Hills.

Throughout the year, AAFCA pushes to leave an influential mark with a few tentpole events including its annual awards; AAFCA Goes to Broadway in New York; AAFCA TV Honors and the Special Achievement Awards, which will be given out Sunday in Los Angeles. AAFCA partnered this year with Delta Air Lines for a curated in-flight film collection to celebrate Black History Month and joined forces with the British Academy of Film and Television Arts to launch a monthly conversation to help Black creatives navigate the industry. Last year, the organization collaborated with the Grammy Museum to explore the intersection of music and storytelling through a yearlong program.

"We have reach," said Robertson, a longtime journalist and author. His organization was launched in 2003 after the founders noticed the lack of Black journalistic voices covering the film industry from an African diaspora. The group has grown to 130 members including businesswoman Chaz Ebert

and entertainment journalist Kelley L. Carter from across the U.S., Canada and the Caribbean.

"This is not just another chicken dinner," he said.

Madeline Di Nonno, president and CEO of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, said Robertson's ability to genuinely befriend people connected to the TV and film industry has contributed to AAFCA's sustainability. She noted how the awards has been able to draw non-Black creative attendees such as Oscar winners Frances McDormand, Kathryn Bigelow and Bong Joon-ho. "When Gil calls, you jump," said Di Nonno, who was honored in 2019 as part of AAFCA's events recognizing women in cinema. "You don't jump because of fear. You jump out of love and respect. AAFCA has deep, longstanding respect. It's always high caliber, high quality, very strategic."

DuVernay credits Robertson for ensuring that AAFCA makes its presence felt in Hollywood.

She said his efforts within the film community are "deeply felt."

"He's going to show up to your place. He's going to show up to your premiere,"

DuVernay said of Robertson. "He's going to show up to your set. He's going to make sure that you see him around town, and it's not in a flashy way. It feels like community. He's from here. He been living here, and he's seen so many of these careers from their infancy. He's been a source of consistent on the ground presence."

DuVernay praised AAFCA for being a support base for those in Black Hollywood who are overlooked elsewhere.

"AAFCA has been a beautiful example of building your own house approach," said the director, who was recently honored by the organization for her film "Origin," a critically acclaimed project that was hardly recognized during Hollywood's award season. "It allows for there to be a sense of pride, commitment, solidarity within a community that's inside a larger community."

As an independent filmmaker, Deon Taylor can attest. The director said he's been overlooked for much of his career except from AAFCA.

"Ain't nobody thinking of me, but Gil and AAFCA did," said Taylor, who directed "Meet the Blacks,"

"The Intruder," "Fatale" and "Black and Blue." He's become a major player in the independent filmmaking space through his Hidden Empire Film Group, but he hasn't been invited to the Independent Spirit Awards.

Taylor will be honored Sunday at AAFCA's Special Achievement Awards for being a talent on the rise.

"Gil watched my trajectory," he said. "He saw me when no one else did. How is it possible that you could have this level of success and you've never even been invited to the Independent Spirit Awards? You and your wife. Think about that. Everything we've made has been independent at the highest-level making money. And we ain't never got an invite to the Spirit Awards or to an independent event. That's what Gil represents."

Taylor applauded Robertson for honoring director Antoine Fuqua and actor Will Smith last year for their film "Emancipation." It came during a time when Smith faced backlash for his Oscars slap and a 10-year banishment from Academy Awards events.

"Instead of turning his back on him and his project, he viewed Will as an artist," Taylor said. "He celebrated Will and Antoine's artistry, because they worked their (expletive) off on that movie."

He awarded them. That's what it's about, right? ... That's what AAFCA represents."

Robertson is excited about the organization's future. Along with growing its tentpole events, he's looking to move into more curation spaces, increase its range of partnerships and close major book deals. He also wants to continue pushing AAFCA's initiatives to recognize heritage months for LGBTQ, Latino and Asian-Pacific communities and women's history.

"We're looking to continue to expand our footprint," Robertson said. □

Broncos' Browning headlines new investment platform for fans to buy stock in their favorite players

By **ARNIE STAPLETON**
AP Pro Football Writer

DENVER (AP) — A new investment platform that allows fans to buy and sell shares in the future on-the-field earnings of college and professional athletes has received federal approval to begin trading on the U.S. stock market.

Denver Broncos linebacker Baron Browning will headline Vestible Inc.'s initial offering the week of March 18.

Vestible is entitled to 1% of Browning's on-field income, which will be distributed to shareholders, for the remainder of his NFL playing career.

Vestible announced on Thursday the launch of its app for iPhone and Android after it received clearance from the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority.

Fans who register on the platform can buy stock in athletes beginning with Browning, a rising young edge rusher who is entering a contract year in 2024,



Denver Broncos linebacker Baron Browning (56) runs off the field for halftime during an NFL football game against the Las Vegas Raiders Sunday, Oct. 2, 2022, in Las Vegas.

Associated Press

when he'll make about \$3.1 million with the potential for a substantial pay raise with free agency a year away.

Vestible will make available up to 100,000 shares at \$10 apiece in Browning's public offering. Shareholders will receive monthly dividend distributions or they

can trade Browning's stock on the platform which operates alongside Templum Markets, Vestible's broker dealer. Browning, who will receive 80% of the proceeds from his IPO, fits Vestible's profile as an up-and-coming player with a massive upside potential.

"You see the potential for what his next contract could look like, the potential for what kind of player that he could be in this league," said Vestible co-founder Yves Batoba. "That type of upside is really where the intrigue is. Not just from a football stand-

point, but of course from an investment standpoint, as well."

Browning made a successful switch from inside linebacker to edge rusher in 2022 but he also suffered a partially torn right meniscus that season that caused him to miss training camp last summer and the first six games in 2023. Upon his return, he played a major role in Denver's defensive-fueled turnaround.

"It's cool to think I'm going to have my own stock," Browning told The Associated Press recently, calling the new investment platform "a game-changer not just for me, but for athletes everywhere."

Vestible is the brainchild of Batoba and Parker Graham, former teammates on Oklahoma State's football team more than a decade ago who each had brief stints in the NFL. Graham as an offensive tackle for the Baltimore Ravens in 2014 and Batoba as the Miami Dolphins assistant director of player development for several years. □

Fanatics founder Michael Rubin says company unfairly blamed for new MLB uniforms

By **JIMMY GOLEN**
AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Fanatics founder Michael Rubin says his company is being unfairly blamed for new Major League Baseball uniforms that have see-through pants and other fit and design problems.

"This is a little bit of a difficult position," he said on Friday at the MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference. "We're purely doing exactly as we've been told, and we've been told we're doing everything exactly right. And we're getting the s- kicked out of us. So that's not fun."

Since reporting to spring training this month, some players have complained about the fit of new uniforms. The white pants worn by some teams are

also see-through enough to clearly show tucked-in jersey tops.

"I know everyone hates them," Phillies shortstop Trea Turner said. "We all liked what we had. We understand business, but I think everyone wanted to keep it the same way, for the most part, with some tweaks here or there."

Rubin said uniforms were made to the specifications set by MLB and Nike. Fanatics has been making the baseball uniform since 2017, he said; Fanatics bought the company that has been making the uniforms since 2005, so there has been no real change in the manufacturer in almost two decades.

Rubin said Nike made changes "for all the right reasons" after getting

feedback from players who wanted material more breathable and stretchable.

"Nike designs everything. Hands us a spec and says, 'Make this,'" he said. "We have made everything exactly to the spec, and Nike and baseball would say 'Yes, you've done everything we've asked you do to.'"

Rubin said part of the problem is players needing to get used to the changes, saying a similar issue dissipated after NFL and NBA uniforms changed. But in the future he said he would try to involve more people in the decisions.

"They got certain players on board, not all players on board. When you change something so old and so nostalgic you need every-

body to be on board with it," Rubin said. "I believe Nike will be proved right." MLB did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Players' association head Tony Clark said Thursday his members had voiced their

objections.

"The commentary that's being offered suggests that the powers that be are paying attention to the concerns that are there and are engaging how best to address them moving forward," Clark said. □



Philadelphia Phillies players wait to have their photo taken during a baseball spring training photo day Thursday, Feb. 22, 2024, in Clearwater, Fla.

Associated Press

Goalie fights, often a crowd favorite, have almost completely disappeared from the NHL

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**
AP Hockey Writer

Watching fights between Patrick Roy and Mike Vernon and Ron Hextall and Felix Potvin in the 1990s, Martin Biron recalled, he always wanted to be the goaltender who could win a bout as the spunky underdog.

Then he got into one against Ray Emery and asked himself, "What were you thinking?"

Two decades since Robert Esche and Patrick Lalime went at it as part of the Philadelphia Flyers-Ottawa Senators brawl that set the NHL record for penalty minutes, goalie fighting has essentially disappeared from the league. There has not been one since before the pandemic, and only three have taken place over the past 10 years. The disappearance of two heavily padded goalies trading blows is due to the fact there are almost no team-wide slugfests anymore, prohibitive rules and fewer netminders willing to take the risks.

"I think goalies have gotten smarter and they're like, no, there's no reason to get in a fight," Biron said. "Fighting is not as prevalent as it once was, and you don't have the kind of brawls that we



Boston Bruins goalie Byron Dafoe, right, lands a right to the face of Ottawa Senators goalie Patrick Lalime during the third period in Boston, Jan. 17, 2002.

used to have sometimes where you're like, 'OK, I'm going to join in.'"

Biron and Emery in 2007 is one of just seven goalie vs. goalie fights since the 2004-05 lockout and 43 overall dating to 1954, according to HockeyFights.com (there are 141 other times where at least one goalie was involved in a tussle). The vast majority of these unusual crowd favorites came between the late '70s and late '90s during an era when masked

men with an edge were all over the place, from Hextall, Potvin and Roy to Hall of Famer Billy Smith, Steve Shields and Sean Burke.

"There had to be at least 80 fights a year, so the opportunity was at least once a night for something to break out to extend beyond two guys fighting," said retired goaltender Glen Hanlon, who got into five scraps in the NHL, including two against another goalie. "Back then, watching the two turtles

race to center ice to have a fight didn't seem that crazy and it was a lot of excitement. There was a lot more squaring off, a lot more 5-on-5 fighting just a bunch more situations."

Not anymore. The most recent NHL goalie fight was between Edmonton's Mike Smith and Calgary's Cam Talbot on Feb. 1, 2020.

A couple of Stanley Cup winning-goalies, Jordan Binnington and Marc-Andre Fleury, tried to throw down during a game be-

tween St. Louis and Minnesota in March 2023, but officials prevented it from happening. Binnington was ejected and suspended two games for throwing a punch at a Wild forward.

"If you're going for it, you're going for it," said Binnington, who lost \$65,000 in salary as a result. "Last year was close. And I feel like the linesmen have been told to really not let it happen, which is understandable. They're doing their job, and that's what the NHL wants."

It is an automatic ejection to cross the center red line for a fight along with the potential for fines and suspensions. No team wants to lose a goalie over a fight.

After Emery skated the length of the rink to fight Braden Holtby during an early-season Washington blowout of Philadelphia in 2013, Commissioner Gary Bettman brought up the topic when he saw Emery at the White House for the celebration of Chicago's championship the previous season.

"So just hypothetically, if there was a rule that said if you cross the red line to get into a fight with the other goaltender and you get a 10-game suspension, would you have done it?" Bettman asked Emery. □

Associated Press

De Minaur battles past Tsitsipas for spot in semifinals of the Mexican Open



Australia's Alex de Minaur follows through on a return to Stefanos Tsitsipas, of Greece, during a Mexican Open tennis tournament match in Acapulco, Mexico, Thursday, Feb. 29, 2024.

Associated Press

ACAPULCO, Mexico (AP) — Defending champion Alex de Minaur battled past Stefanos Tsitsipas 1-6, 6-3, 6-3 on Thursday to book a second straight spot in the semifinals of the Mexican Open.

De Minaur, the ATP's ninth-ranked player, struggled in the first set and lost it in 28 minutes but rallied in the next two to get the win in 2 hours, 6 minutes.

"It was a tough match, it was not very spectacular because the wind made it hard for both of us," said de Minaur, who broke a

10-match losing streak to No. 12 Tsitsipas.

"My first win against Tsitsipas was meant to be in Acapulco, a place of great memories."

In the semifinals, the third-seeded de Minaur will meet Jack Draper, who ousted Miomir Kecmanovic 6-2, 6-2.

The 25-year-old Australian has won eight matches in a row in Mexico and became the first defending champion in Acapulco to reach the semifinals the following year since David Ferrer in 2013.

Tsitsipas was aiming for his third semifinal in Acapulco. Holger Rune also advanced to the semifinals for the second year in a row with a 7-6 (2), 7-6 (0) win over Dominik Koepfer.

The second-seeded Rune, who in 2023 lost in the final four to de Minaur, will face the winner of the match between Ben Shelton and Casper Ruud.

The 20-year-old Rune now has a 6-0 record against German players on tour level and reached his 16th ATP semifinal. □